

**Letters from Devoted PCA Pastors Regarding Reconciliation**  
November 2015



Dear Fathers and Brothers of the PCA,

We are very grateful to God for the movement of the Spirit in our denomination that is leading us to address issues of racial reconciliation. As we take time to reflect on these matters leading up to our next General Assembly meeting in 2016, there are many pastors throughout our church who have wrestled with these concerns in a variety of contexts, over many years. Many of these pastors are in Presbyteries that are actively working on discussing these topics.

The attached letters are from such a group of pastors who both love the brothers in the PCA and are committed to the unity of the church and the glory of God. These few letters reflect a variety of wrestles, longings, exhortations and invitations from your brothers who more than anything else want to see our denomination become a rich expression of the reconciling power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that can bring all nations and people from all walks of life together under the Lordship of Jesus, for the manifestation of the glory of God.

None of the pastors writing these letters have "arrived." We are all in various stages of being disciplined and discipled graciously by the Lord to grow in embracing the unity that is ours in Christ. If we speak passionately, please know that it comes out of love. If we err, and have spoken offensively in some way, please let love cover a multitude of sins and listen beyond the turn of a phrase that may have been spoken in a better way.

Finally, these letters are not presumptuously meant to be any kind of exhaustive or final word on the subject of reconciliation. These are simply a sharing of thoughts and experiences coming from our hearts to yours in expressing ways that we have grappled with these questions over the years, and that we hope the Lord will use in some small way to provoke, challenge and encourage you in this year of reflection and repentance. Our ultimate desire is that the prayer of our Lord would become a greater reality:

*"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." John 17*

Humbly and respectfully,



E.C. Bell



Abraham Cho



Kenny Foster



Craig Garriott



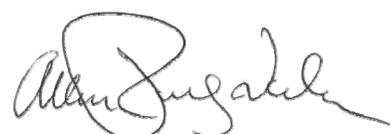
Barry Henning



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Irwyn Ince



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## **The Moderate Approach**

There is no question that the personal resolution proposed at the Chattanooga GA raises an issue that needs to be addressed, but does the resolution mark a change in the PCA either culturally or theologically? I would suggest that there are reasons to suspect the answer is, “no.” It could be argued the resolution is a continuation of the conservative culture and theology that has defined much of the Presbyterian history in America.

It is seen in Dabney’s culturally driven exegesis and Northern Presbyterian’s unwillingness to acknowledge the plight and injustices plaguing immigrant workers in northern factories and mines. It is seen in the action of Edward V. Ramage, Moderator of the synod of the Alabama Presbyterian Church in the United States, when he signed the infamous “Call for Unity” in April of 1963. Dr. King’s powerful response in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” revealed the injustice of Ramage’s and the other pastors’ request.

The nature of power is to seek to maintain the status quo. The Presbyterian Church, in her various forms, has enjoyed a great deal of prestige for most of this nation’s history. We have not been immune to the siren song of temporal status and wealth and we have made the ethical compromises necessary to maintain it. It is not easy to give up old idols. Today we may feel compelled to ask forgiveness for the sinful results of that idolatry, but still be disinclined to abandon those idols altogether.

The timing and limited scope of the personal resolution, some forty years after the founding of the PCA, seem to fit naturally in our cultural and theological tradition: a long standing commitment to the idols of cultural and institutional stability, even if that means the delay of justice for the oppressed. This commitment has rendered us all but incapable of recognizing any current cultural and social injustices that we are participating in and benefiting from. If we continue in our historic pattern, which has been marked by unbending commitment to a cultural ‘conservatism’ and follow an underdeveloped doctrine of sanctification, we are condemning ourselves to a future of belated apologies and ongoing kingdom impotency.

The opportunity presented by the proposed resolution is not simply the much needed confession of particular sins of omission or commission but the opportunity to ask the deeper, far more difficult questions, “Why did it take so long?” and “What kind of changes do we need to make to break the pattern?”

## **The Idol of Institutional Continuity and Preservation**

It isn’t as if we have suddenly come to the realization that segregation and Jim Crow are biblically indefensible. In the mid 1990’s as a student at Covenant Theological Seminary I wrote a paper on the cultural pressures that contributed to the momentum that led to the forming of the theologically and culturally conservative PCA. I found references in sermons and papers of the period that decried the ‘negative’ impact of the secular developments destabilizing society - particularly civil rights and the rise of feminism. These were pointed to as evidence and reasons for the formation of a new biblically conservative/faithful reformed denomination. And when I interviewed the few ‘moderate’ PCA leaders that I had access to in St. Louis and Atlanta and asked their view on admitting publically the error of such past statements and views the answers fell into two categories.

The first centered around the reality that there were still too many people in the PCA who still supported separation of the races to varying degrees; therefore, raising the issue would create division, and any statement of confession would be seen as an attack on their heritage. It was suggested to me at that time that it would be better for all concerned to wait until more founders went to be with the Lord – and hope and pray for a future when it could be addressed without division.

The second reason was even more pragmatic. Consider the financial realities. There was simply too much money for church planting and denominational institutions on the line. Better to use the funds to train non-segregationist pastors and plant more open churches which in turn would produce the desired result of creating an environment

where a dialogue and confession could be realized with little or no division.

On the face of it, the 'moderate' approach has succeeded. Now, the climate is finally right for the PCA to raise the idea (in public) that segregation, our role in it, and the rewards we reaped from perpetuating it, were sinful. A good portion of the founding generation of the PCA are with the Lord or unable to engage in a vigorous debate that might be divisive. Now we can stand on the courage of our convictions.

It's true it would have been a bruising battle back in the '90's. Let us not forget we elected an openly segregationist moderator as late as 2000. It was completely reasonable to suggest that church-planting funds from historic southern churches might have dried up. Instead we have been able use those funds to plant PCA congregations, which by in large are more biblical on race and human rights issues.

So now we are dropping the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy on the culpability issue because a younger generation is asking and they might well leave if we do not issue a public apology. So, it is time, from an institutional perspective, to address this issue. There is now more upside for our institutions than downside. There are few left to object, internally, and clearly from the perspective of attracting the younger demographic we can no longer keep silent and expect to have any hope of numerical growth. The tolerance of thinly veiled racist remarks across the PCA relating to immigration and crime may be a worrying trend, but let's let our children deal with that forty years from now.

The logic of our institutional and cultural idolatry is internally consistent and from a human perspective it is hard to argue with the short-term result. But the question remains - does the continued embrace of such pragmatism condemn us to a future as perpetrators of systemic oppression and deniers long after even the secular world has recognized (biblical) injustice? God forbid. But without an ongoing willingness to examine the current injustices we seem content to live with for the sake of expediency, our children and grandchildren will be condemned one day to apologize for our mistakes.

If part of the answer to the question, why did it take so long, is for the sake of institutional stability, it is easier to ask the victims to wait than it is to confront our friends. It would seem that we might need to repent of our repenting.

### **Weak Sanctification**

The practical unwillingness to address racism on an institutional level betrays an unwillingness to address the issue on an individual level. I believe this serves to highlight the weakness in the PCA's practical view and expectation of sanctification. There is no doubt that sanctification will be incomplete this side of glory. It is also important to note that pastorally the work of the Spirit in sanctification is often slow and gracious. It has been wisely noted that if the Holy Spirit were suddenly to reveal all of our sin at once it would be overwhelming. We cannot expect long held cultural and theological sins and errors to be instantly acknowledged. Nor can we underestimate the difficulty those enslaved to sins have in repenting; particularly if they see the sin as a foundational part of their heritage. What is regrettable is that we have had no culture of pastoral engagement seeking to address these issues; no patient but purposeful plan to be used by the Holy Spirit to rescue our brothers in Christ from the bondage to this sin. Instead there has been resistance to addressing segregationist TE's or RE's. We have even redefined racism so that it does not include segregation. In 2014 Greenville Seminary argued in response to criticism of its establishing a chair for a segregationist faculty member, that segregationist views are not racist. Redefinition of a sin so that it is no longer a sin is a tragic surrender and troubling denial of the power of the gospel.

We seem content to confront and discipline a particular set of sins in our churches that are often sexual in nature (adultery, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity), but not an officer of the church who thinks slavery and segregation are biblically defensible positions and should be the law of the land. Have we left such people in positions of power because we doubted the power of the Spirit to apply the work of Christ to bring about change in their lives? If the willingness to adopt a position of 'moderation' (refusing to address directly the old racists' need to repent) exists because the battle caused by calling sin "sin" might have harmed the institutions, this has profound implications for the spiritual care of our people. Tragically the indifference could also be seen as profoundly judgmental and arrogant. Have we in effect dismissed the old racists as simply not worth the effort, their sanctification not worth the conflict and hassle?

## **No region is without racism and oppression**

The personal resolution's encouragement for individual congregations to confess their participation is important. Racism is not a Southern Presbyterian issue. It is an issue, sadly, that exists across the country - from the burning of African American homes and business by white rioters in Midwestern cities during the Great Migration, to the impact and benefit we received through redlining mortgage practices, particularly in Seattle and Portland but also across the country, which were met with no resistance from Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Old RPCNS churches were silent during the riots over bussing in the Northeastern cities, and no one wants to talk about white flight to the suburbs which remain largely segregated and where most of our church planting efforts are focused. Each one of us should 'look to our own house' to see when we have been guilty of oppressing not just African Americans but Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Hispanics and the poor in general.

### **Conclusion:**

A wise friend once told me, "Opportunities pass you by but your problems never leave you." There is an opportunity to repent and head in the opposite direction toward Christ and His Kingdom. This is such an opportunity for the PCA, but not if we limit ourselves to a moderate, narrowly focused apology. And not if we fail to ask disturbing questions like, "Why are we so comfortable asking the oppressed to endure so that we are not inconvenienced?" And, "What might that say about whose kingdom and institutions we are really building?"

The PCA is not alone in its institutional and cultural pragmatism. The church will never be perfect and she regularly finds herself waking up under someone else's spreading sacred oak tree; but we are not condemned to this path. We can, by the Spirit, seek the wisdom to recognize the false wisdom of moderate and conservative delaying tactics which require that the oppressed be patient while we continue on unwilling to risk our institutions and relational goodwill on their behalf. Let us turn from the historic pattern of institutional preservation and delayed sanctification that would condemn us to another forty years before a future generation has to confess the sins we are committing today.

E.C. Bell

Newberg, Oregon

August 19, 2015

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<sup>1</sup>The 'legal' forced sterilization of poor people, black and white, as late as the 1970's in states like Virginia is a good example and the silence from Ft Lauderdale churches in 2014 when the city pasted ordinances discouraging the feeding of the homeless.



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Fathers and Brothers,

I join my voice with those of the other authors of these letters as an Asian-American teaching elder. On the one hand, it seems that Asian-Americans have been far too often silent on issues of race and reconciliation in the Church. Or, if not silent, at least too often unheard. I do not presume to speak for all of my Asian-American brothers in the PCA, as diverse and varied as we are. But I do speak from my particular perspective as an Asian-American.

In the wake of our denomination's discussions at General Assembly surrounding the Personal Resolution on Civil Rights Remembrance, I have often prayed that this year would be a year of repentance that would lead to healing and joy, certainly for our African-American brothers, but really for us all. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously wrote "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." And surely the reverse is true as well, that a glimpse of justice anywhere is hope for justice everywhere, particularly under the hand of Almighty God. And so it ought to be a season of a kind of serious repentance that leads us all, together, to a greater hope and a greater joy.

But as elders, we all know that the test of true repentance is found not so much in the depth of one's sincerity in a dramatic moment of confession, but in the intentional, ordinary acts of obedience that follow in the days, months and years to come. It is to be found in the persistent rejection of an old way of life and the tenacious pursuit of a new direction borne out of new life in the Holy Spirit. It is this godly sorrow and true repentance that I seek for myself and I humbly exhort for us all. I am reminded of Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

I pray for this earnestness, this eagerness, this indignation, this alarm, this longing, this deep concern and this readiness to see justice done. But what is it that we are to do? My brothers in their letters address this very question with far greater wisdom and insight than I have to offer. As for me, I find that I keep coming back to a story that was told by ruling elder Dr. Alexander Jun at the assembly-wide seminar "How to Advance Ethnic Outreach and Ministry in the PCA" at our General Assembly.

He told a simple story of giraffes and elephants. In it, the giraffes built homes that over the years they were able to optimize to fit the unique contours and needs of a giraffe. The doorframes were narrow and tall. The ceilings were high and the tables and chairs stood far off the ground. Everything was perfectly crafted and appropriately suited for giraffes. One day some elephants came along and the giraffes, after their friendly manner, invited them into their homes. The giraffes, as good hosts, went out of their way to make the elephants feel welcome and honored as guests. But unbeknownst to them, the elephants were wrestling uncomfortably with very real, even if unintended, barriers—barriers that reminded them at every turn that they were outsiders. They couldn't fit through the doors without great effort and damage to the home. Inside, the chairs were far too high for them to sit on. When they finally climbed onto them, they buckled and broke under their weight. And for all the giraffes' gracious hospitality, the reality remained that the homes just weren't built with elephants in mind. And while this might be well and good as long as the elephants were to be temporary guests, it simply could not do if the giraffes and the elephants sought to live together in the same household as equals, as brothers, as family. To do that would require more than sincere gestures of hospitality. It would require a complete reexamining and reconstruction of the house as they knew it. What is more, they would have to do it together, as equals.

I think there are three reasons why this story has stayed with me. First, it shows me that we must desire—deeply—to live together across difference in the same household of faith. We must long for it with earnestness, indignation and alarm. We must have the biblical vision for our Church, that it would not just be a place of peaceful coexistence, or

even, for that matter, just of racial reconciliation. What we need is to see the biblical vision for a community of genuine intimacy, which in the face of a long history of wrongs and injustices, can only be realized on the far side of racial reconciliation. Do we, the PCA, desire this intimacy with earnestness, indignation and alarm?

Second, it shows me that we must acknowledge that our house was originally built with one group in mind—the group that built it. In fact, our house was so well built for this group that its particularities became invisible and therefore normalized and universalized. But now, as other groups come in, the “giraffes” must listen. When “elephants” draw up the courage to tell them that this house has never fit them well, “giraffes” must be eager to hear. And this is especially true in moments when one simply can’t understand how this home could possibly be inhospitable. This, by the way, is partly what some of us mean when we speak of systemic racism and implicit bias. It does not necessarily mean to assign mal-intent on the part of the builders (though at times it must certainly do that); it is instead primarily an attempt to articulate the negative impact that institutional structures and assumptions have on those on the margins. Is the PCA willing to acknowledge the reality of these institutional biases and proactively seek to alter its structures so we can all live in this household of faith together as equals?

Third, it reminds me that whatever it is that we are to pursue—this year and beyond—we have to do it together. To assume that a committee of “giraffes” alone could undertake the task of modifying this house for the good of the “elephants,” would result in mere cosmetic changes, not to mention the inherent paternalism that would perpetuate. But on the other hand, a committee made up exclusively of “elephants” would not do either. Instead, leaders of all races and backgrounds must be given a seat at the table as equals, empowered to make real decisions about the direction of our household. And if that is done right, I dare say that it will necessarily result in discomfort, even a sense of loss, on the part of our brothers of the dominant culture. This, too, must be acknowledged together. And then rejoiced in together. For if it cost Christ his tears and his blood to bring down the dividing wall of hostility that we had erected within his household, it should come as no surprise that participating in his mission of “creating in himself one new humanity out of the two” (Eph 2:15) might cost us something, too.

Brothers, I pray that we would do this together, not grudgingly, but with eagerness, indignation, alarm, longing, deep concern and a readiness to see justice done.

Respectfully,

Rev. Abraham Cho

New York, New York

28 September 2015

*Kenny Foster has served as an Associate Pastor at Grace Presbyterian Church in Dover, DE for the past 9 years. Kenny's calling was to come and assist a mono-ethnic church pursue its vision of becoming multi-ethnic. He and his wife Connie have been married for 30 years and have two sons and one daughter-in-law; Corey, Cody and Caitlen. Corey lives in Chattanooga while Cody and his wife Caitlen reside in Fort Bragg, NC.*

## **"Hallowed Be Your Name"**

"You have got to give the white man what he wants." My father's words were like the fingers of a potter shaping the formless lump of clay that was my perception of the world as a nine-year-old boy.

The other hand that worked in the clay of my childish perception was The Lord's Prayer. My father, who couldn't read, would make us recite a Bible verse each week. Fighting preceded going before him as we would argue over who would get to use John 11:35, "Jesus wept." We knew it was the shortest verse in the Bible and our hope was that he wouldn't remember who recited which verse the last time we were before him. My father was a fallible man, but by making me learn scripture he was doing a wise thing. Now decades later I am still mining the caverns of beauty, and probing the depths in the prayer Jesus taught the disciples to pray. It is most profound!

A recent gem I've discovered while mining this pattern of prayer laid down by the Lord is the connection between the first petition of the prayer and racial reconciliation. I had never considered that ethnic separation and ignoring matters of racial division, including separate but equal thinking is dishonoring the name of the Father. In this the disciples prayer, the first petition is to hallow the name of the Father. We know our position with him as his children. Now in prayer and through prayer we learn to acknowledge that he is to be hallowed. And this hallowing of the name of the Father is something that keeps us at peace with him and in sync with what he is doing.

So how do we hallow the name of the Father? I would like to posit this thought: We hallow the name of the Father when we recognize we have a holy deficit that is filled as we experience God's holy love in Christ. This then gives us a corporate identity, which translates the splendor of God's holiness to a watching world. Our worshipping the Lord in the splendor of his holiness then fuels this continued hallowing of his name.

Moreover, this prayer leads to actions. We pray and we work. Consequently, this Prayer of Prayers is instructive for the family of God's living. We should recognize then that this is a kingdom building prayer. Everything expressed in this prayer are things that are true of the kingdom of God right now. The kingdom of heaven is vividly portrayed for us in this The Disciples Prayer.

So in hallowing the Father's name:

### **I. We recognize that we have a holy deficit.**

The word hallowed is usually only heard in relationship to Halloween. Imagine you were on the street asking people, "What does the word hallowed mean?" the answer would be "Halloween?" And most folks couldn't tell you what the word Halloween means. There is no understanding that it means hallowed evening. It is just a time to dress up and get candy. That is the usage of the word hallowed in our culture. Furthermore, if anyone speaks of something being holy it is usually in a derogatory way. Meaning that someone is being self-righteous and holier than everyone else.

We are deficient when it comes to understanding the word hallowed or holy. Other uses in our language are in connection with religion. Christians would say "Holy is the Lord." Some would refer to "holy jihad" in the news, in reference to radical Islamists and their activity. Or perhaps in comedy its used in Monty Python's Holy Grail...it can't be serious. Who takes holiness seriously? But when Jesus uses it to teach us about praying to the Father what does it mean?

Hallowed means to consecrate, to sanctify, to separate from profane things, to dedicate to God. Holy is purity and has a quality that is completely other. It is unlike any thing or anyone. Holiness is splendorous and is immense in its beauty. And it is to be celebrated.

The word holy appears in the Bible some 551 times. It describes things that God says are his. From the Sabbath day in Genesis 2:3, to the ground on which Moses stood when he was in the presence of the Lord at the burning bush. God calls Israel his holy nation in Exodus 19:6. The dwelling place of God is holy, Zion is his holy mountain and offerings were to be holy, certain days were holy, the temple had the holy place and then the Most Holy Place, the priest and his family line were holy to the Lord. In other words everything that God has anything to do with is holy.

Why? It is because God himself is holy. In fact the Bible teaches us that holiness and peace go together. The writer of Hebrews wrote: Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:14) We are commanded in Peter 1:15-16, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written "Be holy, because I am holy."

Everything about God is holy. He is a holy Father. His love is holy love, his anger is holy anger; his kindness is holy kindness, his people are holy people; his kingdom is a holy kingdom; his home is holy, his angels are holy angels. Everything about God is holy. When he acts he does so out of his holy character. He is holy in his love; he is holy in his wrath. He is not tolerant of anything that is unholy.

You might say "I don't know that I like that about God? How can he be holy in his love, holy in his wrath and not tolerate anything unholy? Aren't people unholy? Yet he loves us?" Well, you can't have the parts of God that you like. He is God! You can't dissect him. You have to take him as he has revealed himself to be! Perhaps if you understood how this holy God makes up for our lack of holiness it would change your thinking.

## **II. We experience God's holy love through faith in Christ.**

John Stott makes this observation:

...We find it difficult to hold in our minds simultaneously the images of God as the Judge who must punish evil doers and of the Lover who must find a way to forgive them." But God's love is unlike any other kind of love you and I have ever experienced.

The love of human parents is not always what it is supposed to be. Psalm 27:10 says, *"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."*

Isa 49:15 asks,

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" Parental love can and does fail us. God's holy love never fails. It is unlike any other love. In fact it could be said that God loves those he hates. Romans 5:8 reads, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Emil Brunner says this about Christ's cross:

"The cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite...the objective aspect of the atonement... maybe summed up thus: it consists in the combination of inflexible righteousness, with its penalties, and transcendent love."

Do you see? We cannot have salvation apart from the holy love of God. There is no standing as the children of God apart from this holy love of God being applied to us. Holiness would not/could not leave us in our unholy state. God in his holiness could not tolerate our unholy being and in his love he could not tolerate our destruction. Instead he gives us both his holiness and his love.

Theologian P.T. Forsyth writes:

"Christianity is concerned with God's holiness before all else, which issues to man as love...This starting point of the supreme holiness of God's love, rather than its pity, sympathy or affection, is the watershed between the Gospel and...theological liberalism...My point of departure [from theological liberalism] is that Christ's first

concern and revelation was not simply the forgiving love of God, but the holiness of such love.”

That the holiness of God issues to mankind as love is most amazing! Holiness is not running away from sin and demanding its punishment, rather it runs toward the sinner and seeks to convert them into family. That is what Jesus did for us! It is through faith in Jesus Christ that people encounter this holy love of God. So what happens when we come face to face with this holy love of God? Well encountering the Father’s holy love in the gospel calls us to repentance and faith. In the confrontation of such love what do you say?

I will tell you what I did. I came with my sins, my anger, my lusts, my rebellion and pride, my guilt and shame, my own attempts at trying to produce righteousness my way, and I gave them all up. I prayed and said, “Lord have mercy on me a sinner.” This is the confession for all who are in Christ. We all experience the holy love of God through repentance and faith in Christ. If you have yet to give yourself to Christ then the holy love of God is not yours, you are still facing the holy wrath of God.

He has revealed his love for you in Christ; repent of your sin; ask him to forgive your sin and make you his holy child for Jesus’ sake. The Father will do it! Receiving the Holy love of God by faith in Christ is the first step in hallowing the Father’s name. This makes him our Father and thus it gives us a new corporate identity.

### **III. We Have A Corporate Identity**

We have a new identity that is shaped by hallowing our Father’s name. We translate the Father’s holy name to the watching world. When I say “we,” I mean the whole family of God. Paul describes the size of the family in Eph. 3:14-15,

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name.”*

Paul’s prayer is that the uncommon wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through this family of God. That uncommon wisdom, (we could call it holy wisdom) is what God showed in revealing the mystery of his will to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Eph. 1:10)

Where did Paul get such an idea about the gospel? I suspect he saw it in this prayer that Jesus teaches us to pray, *Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be your name.*” That the pronouns used in the prayer are first person plural, it reminds us that our prayers are not just about our personal wellbeing. So then the context of the prayer is looking at the practice of the family that is to hallow the name of the Father. We bear his name. Back in my truck driving days we were constantly reminded that the truck and trailer had a logo on the side, BI-LO. We were reminded that people would somehow connect the way we drive with the way the company does its business. I didn’t have a separate identity apart from the truck when I was driving it...the truck, the company and I were one. That is what it means to have a corporate identity.

The way we interact with one another. The way we love each other. The way we intentionally reach across lines of ethnicity, disabilities, and class are all ways that we share in the corporate identity we have in Christ. We are not white Christians, Korean Christians, Latino Christians, black Christians, etc. We are Christians who happen to be white, black, Latino, or Korean. The color of our skin doesn’t enhance or modify our identity in Christ. You see our identity is not derived from our ethnicity, or class or ability. Our identity is derived from the Father and his name. Hallowing his name is related to my relationship with my fellow Christians.

This means their struggle is my struggle as we are commanded to, “Bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:2) That is why it was important for Christians to stand up with other Christians and all those who are oppressed when we see it taking place. Holiness is not merely personal it is communal. And in the healing of the ethnicities begins with the hallowing the Father’s name within his family.

P.T. Forsyth is a theologian writing at the time of WWI. Listen to what he says about holiness and unity and healing of the race:

*“That moral certainty of God's conquering holiness is the only foundation of any faith in man's unity, when the last pinch comes. It is not in himself but in his God as his Savior. It is his unity in a Redeemer and a Redemption, a unity not natural but supernatural, not by evolutionary career but by mortal crisis, not in the*

first creation but the second, not in generation but regeneration. Nothing can give us footing or hope amid the degeneration of man but his regeneration by God. God's method with evil is not prevention but cure. And this is the note of the Church, moral reconciliation, holy regeneration, upon a world scale—the new Humanity. This faith is the only condition, nay, the only creator, of Church unity; and it is the only creator, through the church's Gospel, of the unity of the race and its peace.”

Have you ever considered that the key to racial unity and peace is the holiness of God? God's conquering holiness is the ignition point of the whole family deriving its name from the Father! If I place my ethnicity as that which defines me I am not treating the name of the Father as holy. If I am deriving my identity from my social status, then I am not treating the name of God as holy. If I use sexuality as the basis for my identity, then I am not hallowing the name of the Father. What are you using as your identity? If you are defining yourself by something other than the Father's holy name, you are mistreating the name. You are seeking to be individualistic, when holiness is calling you to unity.

Hallowing the name of the Father is tied to the way we love, serve, forgive, and supply for each other's wellbeing. This is something that the Israelites were indicted for by God in Ezekiel 36:23, “I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them.” It was not just their personal holiness that led to the chastisement of the nation, but it was their ignoring the injustices of their neighbors. The self-righteousness of the nation was an idol that blinded them to the suffering of others. By ignoring the oppression around them they profaned God's holy name.

You see the reason you don't ask for your own daily bread is because you are part of a family. You should want every member of the family to have food. The reason you don't ask only for your sins to be forgiven is because you have a corporate responsibility to seek and give forgiveness to other people in the family. If hallowing the name of the Father were only about personal standards of holiness, then Jesus would have been applauding and celebrating the Pharisees!

Hallowing the name of the Father means embracing our new corporate identity in Christ. And we translate the splendor of the holiness of the Father to a watching world with our uncommon love for each other. Holiness sounds like a lot doesn't it? Does it feel intimidating to hallow the Father's name? This is why Jesus said to pray!

#### **IV. How do you not become overwhelmed by what it means to hallow the Father's name?**

Forsyth again:

“There are some people who actually work at holiness. It is a dangerous thing to do, to work at your own holiness. The way to cultivate the holiness of the New Testament is to cultivate the New Testament Christ, the interpretation of Christ in His Cross, by His Spirit, which cannot but produce holiness, and holiness of a far profounder order than anything we may make by taking ourselves to pieces and putting ourselves together in the best way we can, or by adjusting ourselves with huge effort to a universal process.”

Christ makes people holy! You rest in Christ! When the Psalmist says in Psalm 29:1-2

*1 Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.*

It is worshiping the Lord as members of the Father's family that eases the intimidation. This is true because you find that He who is holy provides the means for you and I to be holy as we take in the splendor of his holiness as we worship. What does that mean? Two things to help us grasp this: There is the analogy of the sun and being in the presence of impressive beauty.

**First:** I would liken it to the sun. You know the sun will shine right? And you don't have to make the sun do its work; it just does its work. You don't have to think about the way plants derive their nourishment from the sunlight. Photosynthesis doesn't have to be understood in order to appreciate the splendor of the sun. You just know that it will do its work as it shines. Accept the sunshine! If the sun doesn't shine all of life on earth will cease! Even humans. So worship the Lord with other believers across the lines of race and class! Let your worship of the Lord do its work in you!

The Lord's holiness will transform you from one degree of glory to the next as you worship. And just as the sun gives light and life to everything on the planet; everything about us depends on the name of our Father being hallowed. Everything! It is the Father who will change you.

**Second:** His impressive beauty captivates you. Isa 6:5-8

*5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Impressive beauty that exposes you and yet accepts you: Isaiah found that he is crushed in vs 5; he was cleansed vs 6-7; he was commissioned vs 8. Do you know what this will do to you if you take this in? One, it will unmask you. It will take the mask off. Like the king of the woodland elves in the last Hobbit movie, The Battle of the Five Armies, when the dwarf king Oakenshield rejected his offer and scorned him for abandoning the dwarfs, the king's mask comes off and he shows the scars he received from the dragon's fire. He'd been hiding them. We all want our masks to come off and when they come off to find we are loved and accepted in the presence of someone who is greater than we are. That is what hallowing the Father's name will do for us.

P.T. Forsyth one last time:

"Unless there is within us that which is above us, we shall soon yield to that which is about us."

This is why we need to hallow the Father's name! He sees you unmasked and loves you enough to change you!

When considering the upcoming talks at the next General Assembly, one has to take in account the way we pray and work to see the first petition of hallowing the name of the Father accomplished. Repentance is appropriate because we fail to hallow the name of the Father in loving our neighbors across the lines of ethnicity; we fail in pursuing the poor, or standing up for the oppressed and the alien. God's name is not hallowed by us before the watching world because we are too busy trying to remain separated as the family of God! And we have no credibility to speak to the sins of racism and classism or discrimination.

I, as a Christian who is Black, by the grace and sovereign will of God, remain in the PCA in order to fight against the perception that my earthly father infected me with. I want for all of us the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, beginning with, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name..."

I am convinced that our prayers to hallow the Father's name in this way will yield the praise that is to be ascribed to his name. I am convinced that this will reflect the splendor of his holiness.

### **Conclusion:**

These are actions we can take to complement the prayers we pray:

1. Recognize that we have a holy deficit. None of us are holy on our own. We are not holy individually nor collectively.
2. Understand that we experience God's holy love through faith in Christ and this makes up for our deficit. Believe the gospel individually and corporately. This is the first step in hallowing the Father's name.
3. Embrace the new corporate identity we have members of the Father's family. Remember the family in both heaven and earth derives its name from the Father. In the name of the Father, defend the oppressed; serve the poor for in so doing we honor God. (Prov. 17:5) Know that God is answering our prayer in the way we love, serve, forgive, live in unity and supply for each other's physical needs.
4. Not be intimidated by holiness, but worship the Lord, basking in the splendor of his holiness, celebrating the Father!

For just as everything living derives nourishment from the sun, worshipping the Lord in all of his beauty with all our diversity, it will provide the nourishment for our souls to be as holy as he is holy.

No one can be holy without Jesus and it takes all of us to comprehend and express the holiness of God. And Jesus says, "Pray that the Father's name is hallowed above all things, for everyone, everywhere." Amen?

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*Craig Garriott with his wife Maria, soon after marrying, were called to a mission work in urban Baltimore in 1980 to plant a church that became Faith Christian Fellowship, a multi-ethnic, socio-economically diverse PCA church committed to building grace-filled disciples through a Christian community development focus. Craig continues to serve the church as pastor. The church's ministries included Baltimore Christian School, a non-tuition-based Christian school (1993-2011), and Pen Lucy Action Network with after-school tutoring programs (1997 to present). Craig received a BS in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies from Virginia Tech (1976), MDIV Covenant Theological Seminary (1982), DMIN in Urban Missions, Westminster Theological Seminary (1996), his project study was Growing Reconciled Communities: Reconciled Communities Mobilized for Wholistic Growth. Craig and his wife Maria, (author of A Thousand Resurrections) have five children and two grandchildren.*

## **Unity: The Gospel Value for Exponential Kingdom Growth in the PCA**

By Craig Garriott, November 2015

Psalm 133 not only reminds us of the beauty, goodness and sweetness of unity in the Body of Christ, it informs us of its miraculous blessing of growth.

*It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.  
(Ps 133:3)*

John Calvin comments on this miraculous grace of unity where the drenching moisture of Hermon somehow finds its way to fall upon the arid, dry Zion. "The dew distilling upon Mount Zion and Hermon, denotes, that a holy unity has not only a sweet savor before God, but is productive of good effects, as the dew moistens the earth and supplies it with sap and freshness." Jesus gets more exacting in the application and promised fruitfulness of this call to holy unity when He focuses His prayer on how the world would know that He has come as our only redeemer: "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (Jn 17:23)

As our beloved Presbyterian Church in America tribe is struggling with growth and sustainability in our increasingly ethnically diverse society it would not only serve us well but foremost honor God to strengthen this gospel value of unity in our midst. The shift to move the PCA from a predominantly white, culturally Anglo church to a multi-ethnic church that reflects the growing demographics of our nation is nothing less than the paradigm shift of the New Testament homogeneous church of Jerusalem to the multi-ethnic church of Antioch. It will not be easy and it won't come without great prayer, persistence, and the power of the gospel of grace. Yet we possess this great gospel that is always reforming us.

In order to help the PCA move more diligently and strategically towards this end, I propose three applications that could be framed as theological, ecclesiological, and doxological.

### **I. Theological: Embrace a Compelling Theology**

***How do we embrace a compelling theology that will give us the courage to advance this transforming gospel?*** We need the forums and safe places to speak the truth in love without the fear of being expelled, but we also need a missional theology we would be willing to die for.

Many of our PCA brothers struggle with culturally conformist movements that seek to grow the church but are weak on theology. This is a valid concern. Yet we in our Presbyterian and reformed history have produced an arsenal of missional theologies that address most of these questions. They can be found in the historical archives. (i.e

<http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/race.html>) The Potomac Presbytery and Chesapeake Presbytery received a study paper on ethnic diversity and approved a slate of affirmations and applications in addressing questions such as how the local church should demonstrate faithfulness to Christ in ethnically and socio-economically diverse communities (i.e. *Ethnic Diversity in the Potomac Presbytery, 2002*). Also, many would consider the theologically driven resolutions of repentance and unity affirmed in the 2002 General Assembly of the PCA a watershed event that greatly advanced the cause of Christ in our midst. The MNA committee has produced many good works as well (i.e. *Ministering Among the Changing Cultures of North America, 2005*). Since our 2015 General Assembly and its additional overtures on race matters, more studies and papers are emerging to give us further clarity, encouragements and applications towards this holy unity.

What we need primarily is not new ideas but the power and discipline to apply the ideas we have already studied and affirmed. We have a strong body of biblically and theologically faithful works related to these missional questions. We need to mine them, highlight and affirm them, and figure out how to keep us accountable as we apply them.

One example of such theological clarity has come from Dr. Vern Poythress, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary. In addressing Ephesians 2:14, "*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*", he highlights the magnitude of the related cultural barriers. He writes, "It (the religious/cultural difference between Jew and Gentile) was the hardest barrier between people in the first century." In commenting on how God brings reconciliation between people and Himself and between Jew and Gentile, Poythress adds,

Old cultural attachments must die for everyone who is united with Christ. When it says He made the two one, nobody stays the same. Nobody has the luxury of clinging to his old upbringing and old culture....The new man is one new man, not pre-Christian Jew or Gentile. But in the process Gentiles are not required to become Jews or visa versa. Both retain a good deal of their former cultural identity... this struggle (of cultural and ethnic conflicts) runs throughout the pages of Biblical history.<sup>1</sup>

Poythress continues to address the root and remedy of racism today. "Racism and ethnic tensions are nourished by root sins-- idolatry, love of self and comfort, money, and power. The comfort of my own upbringing from that of those radically different from me. What is the remedy? He has triumphed. He will triumph. God is triumphing. 'He has made the two one.'"<sup>2</sup>

## II. Ecclesiological: Empower a Diverse Leadership Team

***How do we build a united leadership culture among diverse brothers?*** We need to encourage various representatives to speak wisdom and truth into our structures and help us to do church better. But how do we eliminate an "us and them" mentality church culture so that it is only "we and us"? How do we create a church where those who are different from the present majority PCA culture would not feel like an overwhelmed minority but as beloved and valued brothers and sisters?

Acts 6 displays a healthy church government structure that grew to insure that various people groups would not be overlooked in the process of advancing the gospel. Because the leadership power base was in the sole hands of the dominant Hebraic speaking group, there was a tendency to "overlook" the needs of the sub-dominant group. "...the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1). The Twelve immediately took action. They realized that injustice in the fellowship

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<sup>1</sup>Vern Poythress, Lessons from the N.T.; Lessons from the O.T., lecture presented as part of the "Racial Tensions Racial Reconciliation" at the Second Annual Conference on Contemporary Issues, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA., 9-11 March 1993.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

would be a scandal, disgracing the Name of Jesus and impeding the expansion of the Church. The disciples then choose seven men, most if not all of whom were from the Hellenistic group; all the names listed are Greek names. The power base was expanded and "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.." (Acts 6:7).

Note that in the act of expanding the leadership base, Biblical standards were not diminished. The candidates had to be "known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). This was not a superficial racial quota that diminished the qualifications or standards of leadership. In this regard the church was above the reproach of paternalism or cheap social action. Theological unity would not be compromised for cultural diversity. Not only was the Jerusalem church becoming diverse, but the apostles were consciously affirming leaders among its subcultures. The believers were one in Christ, and they affirmed the cultures of the diverse subgroups.

Yet it should also be noted that the wisdom of the early church was not that of finding a token representative here and there to speak and act on behalf of their "own kind" of people. Such single representation becomes a heavy burden that no one should carry alone. Such representative leadership is also prone to be overlooked and marginalized by the well-intended dominant leadership culture. The wisdom was to establish a force, a team of culturally connected leaders who joined in mass and became fully incorporated and interdependent within the larger leadership team. This is not a complex principle to apply, but it results in a significant power shift or more accurately, a redemptive leadership sharing. God reveals for us the fruit of such faithful leadership adjustment. "The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly."

Dr. John Frame captures well "the ideal thing" in how the church should function as we grow together in Christ. It applies also in how we govern the Body as a diverse team of leaders.

The ideal thing (a pre-fall situation) would be for the whole human race to work as a team, seeking out all the mysteries of the creation together, trusting one another, collaborating peacefully on a great edifice of learning, each contributing his bit to a body of knowledge far larger than any individual could comprehend. Something like that is what God intends for His church. He wants us to grow together toward a knowledge of Him that is broader than any of us, which marvelously, somehow matches that of its Head, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 4:15f).<sup>3</sup>

### **III. Doxological: Experience the Soul Language of United Worship**

#### ***How do we keep the unity of the Spirit in our corporate worship of diverse peoples?***

The worship of God by the united people of God is not only a most visible witness to the reality of Christ's presence in the world (John 17), it is also a vital worship prescription in how we glorify and give praise to God.

Paul makes this clear in his exhortation to the Roman believers,

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.... as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." Romans 15:5, 9,10

The Apostle Paul instructs the historically alienated and culturally separated Jews and Gentiles of Rome to bear with one another and to receive each other into their hearts as dear friends. The whole of the scriptures speaks not only to the movement towards the climatic united worship celebration of all God's peoples who be gathered together "from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Rev. 5:9), but also to practice this sacred calling of united worship now to the best of our abilities.

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<sup>3</sup>Frame, The Doctrine Of The Knowledge Of God, p. 159

Yet in this struggle for united worship Paul gives us the model and motive to advance this gospel in our worship. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7) Acceptance here is not mere toleration that allows for emotional disconnection but to "take as one's companion, to grant access to one's heart" as Christ has entered into our world and embraced and loved us completely. Cultural and personal preferences of worship were therefore subordinated to the priority of family unity in which God delights. God-pleasing worship requires that I consider and support what will help brothers and sisters who are culturally different from me enter into the worship of the Father in Spirit and truth. This will take work and effort. This will require some dying to self. But out of that effort for unity and burial of self will arise a Kingdom-seeking, Christ-centered worship experience that will reflect and resonate with the soul worship in heaven. God's people will know it and be filled with even greater praise.

This united worship is not just for the edification of the present church. It becomes a clarion call to lost sons and daughters who are looking for the signs of a Kingdom not of this world. In united worship Christ's visible presence is intensified and His glory more revealed. Paul captures this witness in his encouragement to the diverse church of Corinth when he exhorts them to use understandable and accessible language so that an unbeliever won't feel like a foreigner but when entering would be compelled to worship God saying, "God is really among you!" (1 Corinthians 14:25).

## Conclusion

Our increasingly ethnically diverse communities, the emerging generation, and our post-Christian, post-modern, post-secular, post-everything world is not compelled by abstract theology. However, there is a hunger for Good News manifested in concrete realities. The spiritual and functional practice of holy unity is the key gospel reality that compels people to Jesus Christ. (John 17:20-26) God's beloved church of the Presbyterian Church in America possesses this glorious, transformative gospel. Yet we stand at a missional crossroads. Will we become captive to old cultural patterns that impede our growth or do the hard work of the theology, ecclesiology and doxology for this holy unity and become a leader denomination in the mission of God? Let us by God's grace be like the tribe of Issachar, "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do (1Chron 12:32) and seize the day.

## Appendix: Towards a Compelling Theology for Unity

### Unity Creed

By Craig Garriott from WTS Dmin – "Growing Reconciled Communities" 1996

Richard DeRidder grieves that no creeds exist to help the church reconcile the various cultures that exist in America.

*The heathen, the pagan, the "not-my-people" are no longer oceans away, but all around the disciples today. They are neighbors to each other. Their children play together. They meet at work, in shopping centers, on the beaches. And unfortunately, at this crucial point where the Church of Christ is dispersed in the world confessional statements are silent where they ought to be most articulate.*<sup>4</sup>

Harvie Conn argues that creeds need to go beyond mere affirmation of orthodoxy and catechism instruction. To keep creeds from drifting into abstraction they need to *utter its words to the world.... Their richest service lies in their function of translating the gospel to address the needs of their own day and cultural context.*" In this way creeds become "evangelistic declarations" and invitations to faith for "those who are without."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>DeRidder, *Discipling The Nation*, 213

<sup>5</sup>Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, 241-246.

He quotes Donald McGavran, who affirms this need:

*A missionary confession of faith for today will in every doctrine similarly spell out at great length the will of God as revealed in the scriptures, that all men of every economic stratum, every tongue, every tribe, every religion, and every ideology be given the opportunity to say "yes" to Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>*

At the same time, creeds can help nurture a context for the spiritual transformation of believers and their world views. As Biblical principles are elevated and translated to address specific cultural issues, they become a redemptive grid to help people process the information and values they receive from the world. In this regard, they help create a theological foundation to nurture emerging leaders. Good creeds can help us nurture leaders in community where spiritual truth is applied to all of life and where a vibrant resistance to injustice and evil is normative.

The following Unity Declaration for Faith Christian Fellowship, in Baltimore city is an expression of a PCA congregation's serious effort to *keep the unity* and apply principles of unity throughout the church's ministry. It clarifies and expresses a commitment to celebrate diversity while maintaining unity. At the same time, it speaks to the world concerning the urgent matters of racial justice and reconciliation. In this it invites outsiders to become part of a universal fellowship whose identity is in Jesus and His Kingdom. It reflects three years of devoted labor and prayer by a multicultural group of PCA church members who participated in the congregation's ongoing Reconciliation Task Force.

### UNITY DECLARATION

(Adopted by Faith Christian Fellowship, PCA, May 20, 2000)

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 1: Our Fundamental Identity**

We declare that God our Father, in His great love, has redeemed us by sending His Son Jesus Christ and united us as people, by His blood, from diverse cultures into one family through the Holy Spirit committing to us the message of reconciliation. John 17:20-24; 20:17; Eph 2:13,14;19-22; Rev 5:9,10 Col 3:11; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 4:4,5; Acts 2:5-12, 2Cor.5:19

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 2: Cultural Affirmation**

We declare that God's truth transcends culture and speaks to all cultures. We affirm the Biblical value, dignity and distinctions of our varying cultures because God uses culture to communicate His truth and grace and receives glory from our cultural expressions. Yet we acknowledge that God declares the fallen condition of all people and their cultures. We claim a personal and corporate responsibility to evaluate and bring Christ-centered reformation to our cultures and society by the Word of God in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Gen.1:26,28; 2:15,19; Rom. 8:18-25; Rom. 1:18-32; Rom 3:9-20; Rev 21:24; 1Cor 9:19-23; Acts 17:16, 22-31; John 17:15-19; Matt. 5:27-43

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 3: Repentance & Forgiveness**

We acknowledge that great transgressions based on race, gender, class and faith have tragically marked our life together as a human family throughout the history of the world and this nation. While the Church has pursued justice and reconciliation, regrettably it has often participated in this sin through active support or indifference. We join with those believers who confess that true reconciliation cannot be realized without a commitment to repentance, forgiveness and the pursuit of justice. Neh 1:4-11; Dan 9:4-19; Eph 4:1-6, 32; Phil 2:1-11; Acts 6:1-7

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 4: Necessity Of Grace**

We seek to apply God's grace to our lives. His grace enables us to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. God's grace provides the only means to conquer our fears, remove our guilt, resolve our anger and give us the strength to persevere as one family where Jesus Christ is Lord. We declare that the Holy Spirit is our only source of power for true unity in the Body, and that He strengthens us through daily repentance, prayer and the cleansing power of the Word. Matt. 22:37-40; Eph 3:14-19; 4:1-5; 5:1,2,15-21; 6:10,11; Heb 2:14,15; 1Peter 4:19

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 244.

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 5: Cultural Awareness**

We commit ourselves to acquiring greater cultural awareness and sensitivity, starting first with our own cultural bias and prejudices, recognizing that we live in a multicultural city and world. We believe that cultural awareness is foundational to the way in which we develop leaders, conduct worship, equip the body for evangelism and discipleship, and promote justice and community development. 1Cor 9:19-23; Acts 15:19-21; Acts 17:16-34; Acts 26:28,29; Rom 15:1-4

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 6: Leadership**

We commit ourselves to modeling the reconciliation of culturally diverse believers before the world in our church and ministry leadership. We promote reconciled leadership which understands and values church membership, the unity of the Church, spiritual accountability, the benefit of cultural diversity, shared servant leadership, cross cultural skills, strategic service, sound theology, godly character, spiritual renewal, and discipling emerging leaders. Luke 6:12-16; Acts 6:1-7; 13:1-3; Gal 2:2; Isa 56:1-8; Rev 21:24

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 7: Worship**

We declare that as a reconciled community in Christ we work in our worship services to represent God's Kingdom in our local context. We work to offer God our most precious and valuable expressions of devotion from our varying cultures. Such worship requires the pursuit of excellence as we glorify God in a Christ-centered, believer edifying and seeker welcoming service. Rom 15:5-11; Isa 19:23; Zeph 3:9; Ps 22:27; Rev 7:9,10; Rev 21:24

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 8: Evangelism**

We commit ourselves to work together as a multicultural body to proclaim Good News that communicates Christ to people in their particular cultures with Biblical integrity through culturally sensitive means. 1Cor 9:19-23; 10:33; Matt 20:26-28; Rom 1:14; 2Cor 4:5; Prov 11:30; Rom 11:14; 1Pet 3:1

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 9: Discipleship**

We declare that as we disciple one another towards Christian maturity, we must obey Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We do this by keeping the unity of the Spirit, who indwells believers of diverse and historically separated cultures, in the bond of peace. Eph 2:11-22; Eph 4:1-4; 11-16; Phil 2:1-5; Col 3:5-14; John 17:23; Rom 14:17-19; 1Cor 1:10; 2Cor 13:11

#### **UNITY DECLARATION STATEMENT 10: Justice & Community Development**

We declare that the church is called to be the redemptive presence of Christ by proclaiming Good News which is demonstrated through concrete deeds of mercy and justice. This Good News affirms dignity, cultivates an environment of hope, and restores people to God through Christ and to service in God's kingdom. Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18,19; Acts 6:1-7; Gal 2:10; James 2:1-9

*Barry Henning is founding pastor of New City Fellowship of St Louis, MO where the church has been living and working out issues of reconciliation and justice since 1992 in the urban areas of North St. Louis and University City. New City St Louis is a diverse congregation representing roughly 20 different nations and has extensive ministries in Job Training, Immigrant Housing, Tutoring, Medical Care, Home Repair, University Student Kingdom Discipleship, Legal Services, a diverse Christian School, and Adoption and Foster Care. New City has jointly formed an international mission agency called Kingdom Restoration Society with active church/board participation from Kenya, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo and Burma. We also work with churches in Pakistan, India, Honduras, Zimbabwe and London, England. Barry and his wife Ann live in an inner-city community in St. Louis and have 4 married children and 20 grandchildren.*

Dear Fathers and Brothers in the PCA,

In 2010 some of our denominational leaders asked pastors of churches who were engaged in issues of reconciliation and justice to answer the following questions:

“What would the PCA look like if we were more successful in reaching the diverse cultures of North America and what changes would have to take place? What would we like to see happen? Where do we see God already at work and how can we build on that and learn from that?”

The following was my response, with a little editing for this venue, which I now humbly offer for consideration as *part* of the answer to one of the questions raised by the personal resolution regarding racism at the 2015 General Assembly in Chattanooga: what kind of new obedience will be required to accompany genuine repentance in the area of racial reconciliation?

Please know that everything written here is said with genuine love and respect for believers and churches in the PCA. I believe in the unity of the body of Christ and that it is an absolute truth that we need one another and cannot say to each other “I don’t belong.” It is also said with a keen awareness of my own need to grow in these areas, and an absolute conviction that the righteousness (practically expressed) that we long for can only come by grace through faith in Christ and the work of the Spirit. I am not meaning to be at all judgmental or simply beating anyone with guilt. I hope and trust that is not the reaction. But somehow, at some point, we do need to become better at a serious, critical self-analysis around these issues of reconciliation and justice that lets us ask really hard questions without being defensive. I also know the discipleship process for all of us, personally and corporately, is just that - a process. The need for specific action is real. The process of implementing those actions will be joyful and challenging and take lots of twists and turns; which is all okay, as long as there is real movement by the grace of God.

### **The need for *reconciliation versus diversity***

*John 17:20-22* "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one"

I am going to start with the presupposition from John 17, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1, 1 Peter 2, 1 John 1 (etc.) of a needed, Christ-purchased, Jesus-prayed-for commitment to a God-imagined reconciliation in the church, and not simply diversity. And critical for our discussion is not just ethnic or racial reconciliation, but also social and economic reconciliation. Universities and work places are often diverse, but not necessarily reconciled. The United States as a country is unbelievably diverse, but still without much deep reconciliation. Our church, the PCA is diverse, but not practically, deeply living out reconciliation.

True reconciliation involves an actual in the flesh embracing of one another where we learn to love one another deeply and reflect the true humanity God created us to be, which includes placing a high value on each other; we are meant

to value the differences God created in us; we are meant to function in a way that practically acknowledges we truly need those differences – ethnic and socio-economic - and humbly learn from and submit to the image of God in one another as equal members of the body with differing gifts and functions, all from the same Spirit and all in the same family. It also means we constantly forgive one another, exercise grace for one another, bear one another's burdens and honor one another above ourselves. It is so much like being married and being a family that Paul uses marriage as one of the greatest images of the reconciled church and the rest of the Apostles regularly use direct family language in describing the people of God.

If we want to remain a somewhat diverse denomination without practical reconciliation throughout the denomination - impacting local churches, presbyteries, denominational structures and agencies - then we can simply keep doing what we are already doing. We have some measure of diversity in the PCA. But I do not think it is possible to address past or present sins of racism without eventually getting around to this fundamental issue of a need for a deep, paradigm-shifting change to intentional reconciliation that is both ethnic and socio-economic in scope throughout all aspects of church life.

**We need to accept the reality that we will *need new structures to effect meaningful reconciliation.***

**Mark 2:22** *“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins- and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”*

Where deep repentance would eventually lead us is to a great number of changes in our current wineskins. We will need to humbly work *together* toward genuinely becoming a multi-ethnic, multi-socio-economic worshiping and kingdom-righteousness focused community of churches, with multi-ethnic, multi-socio-economic leadership throughout every aspect of the denomination.

- Local churches would be increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-socio-economic both in their membership and their leadership. Elders, deacons and pastors in the church would come from the black, white, Asian, African, Latino, American Indian communities, both rich and poor, and so would worship, discipleship, community ministries of the local church, etc.
- Presbyteries would have multi-ethnic and multi-socio-economic Licensing and Ordination Committees; multi-ethnic/socio-economic MNA and MTW committees on both a Presbytery and Denominational level would be making vision and implementation decisions as a reconciled team. The “coordinators” of many of the denominational “Agency Teams” would be non-Anglos. Covenant Seminary and Covenant College would be intentionally staffed from the majority-world ethnic groups. The “presidents” of the College and Seminary might come, in turns, from the Anglo community but also from leaders of these different ethnic communities. Denominational magazines and literature and Sunday school curriculum would take on new issues as it turned primarily from the perspectives/concerns of the dominant culture to include the pressing issues of immigrants, refugees, the poor and reconciliation within the churches and denomination, but critically, described and addressed by them without an added dominant cultural spin.

We would begin learning from and being instructed by our brothers and sisters instead of always being in the position of giving instruction.

“What must we do to see the PCA embrace such a vision and move positively in this direction? In other words, what would it take to get there?”

Let me say again, I am very grateful for the PCA, reformed theology in general and the faithfulness and commitment of so many in the denomination to seeking God's glory. I am also immensely grateful for the increase in mercy ministries and ethnic diversity within the denomination. These are all positive signs. However, at present we are culturally, financially and even to a degree, theologically entrenched in a white-upper-middle-class power system that no one will easily let go of. What makes it doubly hard is that some elements of our Christian practice in our churches and denominational structures are interlaced with cultural Christianity which has been given a theological covering that produces a near-impossible grid to break through. Nothing short of a cataclysmic shaking will likely change this. Two

things that bring me great hope: in response to the preaching of the Word and the conviction of the Spirit, we can, together, repent and change. If not, the other good news is that God is in the business of bringing the cataclysmic changes necessary to move his church along (Acts 1:8 becoming a reality through Acts 8:1; the church throughout much of her history including current cataclysmic events throughout Africa in general and the Middle East). So, with that caveat, what would it take to see repentance-based changes take place and actually see significant new obedience?

I believe we need both a theological change (always reforming) and a commitment to system wide structural changes (always willing to create new wineskins).

**We need a theological/practical embracing of reconciliation as a *covenantal obligation*.**

**Galatians 2:14** *"But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"*

- If we do not see the call to reconciliation as a fundamental, moral and covenantal obligation of the church that Christ has both called us to and will Himself equip us for, we simply won't do the hard work to make it happen. If not careful, we can read the Scriptures with heavy cultural blinders and plug in the perspectives and dynamics of an all-white, western, middle class, dominant culture church point of view and believe we can understand and apply these Scriptures to ourselves and to every other ethnic group as well, fully and adequately, while ignoring the historic realities of an early church doing its theology, given to us in the New Testament letters, in a context that included sworn enemies and totally opposing world views and cultures all being called to humbly, lovingly embrace one another in local congregations under the Lordship of Jesus the Messiah. Our cultural points of view help shape what we are sensitive to and see in the biblical narrative, and the more narrow our cultural point of view, the easier it is to "screen out" the call and need for the practical reconciliation of the nations in the body Christ.
- Currently, it seems many of our pastors are overwhelmed with the needs of their congregation members and think that a commitment to reconciliation is a) not really necessary for them to be a faithful church and b) something their legitimately busy, hectic, and sometimes already messed-up-marriages, occasionally workaholic, and otherwise struggling congregations (who can also feel at times that they carry the white man-middle class burden of carrying the load for most of the world, including myself in this assessment) simply do not have time for and is unrealistic.

But the great freedom of the gospel and the kingdom is precisely to die to self and lay our agendas aside and trust God to take up his agenda and find the expression of eternal life we were looking for all along. While I am not naively suggesting that embracing reconciliation and justice are either easy or a cure-all for the self-absorbed struggles with sin in our churches, nonetheless it does, very powerfully, help put many other things into focus and perspective that our Christian communities constantly stumble over: the use of wealth as a Covenant blessing to help others versus storing up wealth for ourselves (1 Timothy 6); the need for the Spirit's vision and gifting in every member of the congregation to bring God's righteousness/justice to the nations (Acts 2), and the deeper equipping of the body for significant ministry that leads to laying down our lives for our enemies (Romans 8, Eph 4); the context of worship, that is meant to be inclusive of all God's people and not bound to one culture (John 4); the purpose and focus of education and career - namely, to be equipped to seek justice and do good to express the glory of God in all aspects of life, which is the only "calling" the Bible actually talks about and applies to everybody (Eph 1); the assessing of life decisions being tied to an eternal kingdom of righteousness and reconciliation that has already begun and being confident that all our labors are not in vain because they lead into this coming kingdom at the return of Christ (Col 1, 1 Cor 15); the accompanying confidence that the darkness of the world's problems will not defeat the kingdom of light, etc.

The theological and practical lack of focus and commitment to reconciliation and justice means our energies go elsewhere. And the elsewhere, if it's not towards the poor and for reconciliation, eventually ends up being some

version of "I can have my best life now." Some form or other of the prosperity gospel is simply the natural offspring of any church that refuses to focus on the poor and reconciliation.

### **We need a theological/practical embracing of *the good news of the kingdom for the poor***

**Luke 4:18-19** *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

**Luke 6:20** *"And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

One of the major contributing factors that has provided us with the theological rationale to function as a church without genuine reconciliation has been a redefinition of the kingdom of God to fit a majority culture and individualistic culture point of view.

We have too often conflated the "good news of the kingdom of God" with only personal salvation and justification. That has left us reading passages about the kingdom for the poor and kingdom justice as simply and only a reference to an attitude of the heart of the individual sinner seeking personal salvation and a standing of forensic righteousness in Christ. We have actually exchanged the amazing announcement of the kingdom of God and the anointing of the Messiah to bring his actual (not only forensic) justice/righteousness to the nations of the earth (Isaiah 42) and to announce good news to the poor and to set the captives free (Isaiah 61, Luke 4) as the means for seeing his kingdom come into this world, to a gospel of only personal, individualized salvation.

This redefinition and individualizing allows us to be complicit in the cultural sins of racism and oppression and economic greed on both a personal and structural level, while still leaving us convinced we can effectively disciple the culture into the kingdom through an intellectual exercise in personal discipleship and Bible study without actually enacting the lifestyle of Jesus and the Apostles.

Very closely tied to this is the history of the white, western church as part of the dominant culture. Because the history of white, western Christianity became entangled with the majority culture power structures, including during the Reformation and later in the founding of the United States, we have increasingly stumbled over the nature of the kingdom of God. We have accepted all along the "natural ethnic division of the church" as a practical reality. Dutch Reformed, German Lutheran, French Catholics, Scots Presbyterian, English Episcopalian. The lure of cultural power within those nation groups helped rationalize this reality. Perhaps the highest expression of an ethnocentric, dominant culture church in the Protestant tradition that we still extol today as the model we all aspire to, was the work embodied in the life of Abraham Kuyper. That model has left us too often with a working definition of the nature of the kingdom of God in its greatest expression, as primarily focused on shaping world views through the systems and structures of the culture - including the arts, science, politics, economic structures and educational institutions.

While all these things are certainly meant to be redeemed, the unchangeable fact that God has called the weak and lowly and the despised things of this world to be the source of confounding the wise and strong is lost on us. The ministries of Jesus and the apostles and many church leaders around the world today, and even in the immigrant church in the U.S., would find it hard to fit in the structures and aspirations of our denomination.

As the Scriptures are read from the perspective of the poor and oppressed and excluded minorities, the obvious (to their eyes) dramatic expression and even the scandal of the power of the kingdom in the life and ministry of Jesus and the Apostles and the early church, is that the kingdom rule and reign of the Messiah confronts, tears down and redeems all those structures slowly over the course of time specifically by walking directly with the poor and oppressed of the earth and without discrimination - making everyone who has faith in Jesus the Messiah, regardless of ethnicity or social status, an equal member of the family of God.

The side effect of that kind of embracing love and obedience indirectly but most forcefully challenges those systems. We can get so focused on changing the culture that we actually neglect the very things Christ has called us to humbly do that will, in God's good time, change the look of things. The nature of the rule of God is that it is actually focused on the poor and oppressed who look to God for their help - the purpose and promise of the kingdom rule of the Messiah is directed their way - the kingdom is for the poor. Oppressor and oppressed, rich and poor are all saved by grace through faith in Christ, but the kingdom rule of this Messiah has a look to it; and at the heart of it is an intentional care for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the immigrant and the oppressed.

Our continued and increasingly segregated churches over the past 50(+/-) years, both ethnically and socio-economically, has produced a Christianity in many of our congregations that is simply ethno-socio-economic-centric and self-absorbed. And as we all know from counseling couples in crisis over the years, two self-absorbed people simply won't reconcile. Unless all the ethnic groups within the PCA seeking reconciliation are committed to such a kingdom vision, I do not believe real reconciliation will work. To attempt deep, long term reconciliation among different groups who are vying for their own agendas of the kingdom without accepting the call of God for a deep reconciliation as a covenantal obligation that focuses our energy on the poor and oppressed of the earth, is a recipe for more entrenched segregation. The end result, "best case" scenario is what we currently have in the PCA- a Plessy v. Ferguson church culture of "separate but equal" where the dominant group controls the agenda. None of this will hold up for very long.

Instead, the biblical picture in the early church ought to help us know the gospel is powerful enough to see that rich and poor, slave and free, black, white, Latin, Asian, American Indian, formally educated and street educated can all be called to be members of the one family of God. And we are all called to the same sacrifices and service - to forgive and love one another in a community that is constantly embracing one another and the outcast and broken, and shows this same love for the world, even our enemies. What is it that has kept us from such practical, real expression of the reconciling love of God for one another except cultural pride and self-protection?

Of course, the good news of the Gospel is that real change is always available, at any moment in time, if we truly repent and do the things God has called us to do. So, where do we begin?

- There must be an intentional commitment to be a welcoming, embracing community in every aspect of church life, for the powerless and poor, as well as those from every ethnic group in our communities. The flow of the ministries of the church, as well as the allocation of resources must move in their direction. In a good way, there are many realities nudging us in this direction, and I want to affirm the many good things happening in our denomination. But it has not yet changed many of our churches or Presbyteries or the denominational power structures.
- In addition to asking forgiveness, we (myself very much included), the white, dominant culture leaders in the PCA, must also confess that we do not know how to make this reconciliation work on our own. The established white leadership cannot effectively figure out how to do reconciliation on its own, on any level. The very nature of paternalism is to try and resolve these issues without equal input from other groups. The good news is that many of our churches are in changing neighborhoods. Immigrants, refugees and other long standing minority groups in our culture keep invading the suburban community. These are tremendous opportunities to embrace the richer, fuller focus of the kingdom as we learn to humbly partner with one another.
- We need to make use of the non-Anglo, non-upper-middle class contacts we already have within the PCA, as well as other willing brothers and sisters who will help us to reconsider everything from our theological training, to worship styles, to Session, Diaconal and Teaching Elder leadership, to the development of outward focused ministry teams energized for reaching out to other diverse and poor communities, to Presbytery and Denominational structures.

**We must also theologically and practically embrace *the humble circumstances necessary to express the kingdom.***

***Philippians 2:5-8*** “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

The paradigm of our culture and of a great many of our churches is one of educational and financial power, personal efficiency, task accomplishment and sometimes a rather naive idea that we are the change agents for the whole world. This isn't all of us all the time; but it is a part of most of us a good deal of the time. We can hardly talk about starting a project without turning to questions of “national model” and “global impact” within a few sentences.

The model and the teaching of Jesus, the apostles and the early church is that the kingdom moves forward in humble circumstances. It's not just individually that God's power is made known in weakness, it's also corporately. The one church that is the most pitiful in John's letter-message from Jesus is Laodicea. It is the one with the most cultural power, and the biggest blinders.

The theme of God choosing to lead his people in humility runs all the way through the history of Israel (Deut 17:14ff, 20:1ff and virtually every O.T. godly leader you read about) and into the fullness of the expression of the kingdom in the life of Christ (Phil 2 and too many passages to list), the apostles (see esp. 1 Cor 4:1ff and 4:16), and the church (1 Cor 1:26ff). The fundamental reasons for God directing his people into these humble, dependent conditions are centered on the issue of the Israel being a people “for the poor” and then, when the full expression of the kingdom comes in Christ, the church pursuing a kingdom that is focused for the benefit of the poor and oppressed.

- When we come to the poor and minorities who are not part of the dominant culture, from positions of cultural power, we naturally tend towards paternalism. Which is one of the other reasons we have the need to imitate Christ and the Apostles by embracing humble circumstances: it is the boasting in human power (of any kind) that actually feeds division (1 Cor 1:10ff). If we do not see this as a theologically revealed paradigm for the church and something which we must practically embrace as Israel was called to and Jesus and the apostles lived out, and most of the church around the world lives with, I don't know that we will ever experience large scale reconciliation because our paternalism will always be a barrier.
- The implications, of course, are pretty revolutionary (cataclysmic to our current systems). Our colleges, seminaries, church buildings, pastor's salaries, missionary support levels, church planting strategies and world mission endeavors would all change and include more of a deliberate move towards the poor, instead of seeking to bring the poor up to our standards and comfort level. Again, some things are happening here. But it is not what is driving the thinking of the church structurally as a whole.

Currently we are viewed by too many in and outside of the United States as a willing conspirator with the western cultural abuses of wealth, power and paternalism. The church in this humble, reconciled position would be a genuinely prophetic voice against those cultural abuses and a voice from the reconciled nations for God's glory in his justice and compassion through the kingdom of Jesus our Messiah and Lord. With these changes the poor would be valued and genuinely embraced, deep reconciliation would be fostered and there would be a real sense of the kingdom of God being lived out in the body of Christ that would be our small part in the greatest apologetic any culture can witness for God sending Jesus as the Messiah for the world.

Respectfully,

Barry Henning

New City Fellowship St Louis

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## JUSTICE IS NOT BLIND

On Monday August 10<sup>th</sup> I participated in a Saint Louis Clergy civil disobedience that involved a march from Christ Church Cathedral downtown to the Tom Eagleton Federal Building. The purpose of this action was to go forward as a show of unity and solidarity, to pray, sing hymns on the steps of the Federal Building and demand that the United States Attorney for Eastern Missouri move forward on the changes that must be made to ensure that all who are sworn to serve and protect will be better equipped to serve and protect people, not systems.

When the federal marshals and STLPD threatened the peaceful crowd with chemical agents, some of us decided on the spot to be dragged, tazed and/or cuffed as a way of distracting or at least slowing down that type of dispersal tactic, hoping to prevent many (including children) from being harmed. This action was announced last Friday night at the conclusion of our First Friday Prayer meeting. Obviously, though the possibility of arrest was discussed at the meeting, my arrest could not have been announced. My hope, along with those of everyone who participated, was that we would not be arrested, but engaged. I believe we were heard, in some small way, but I believe we must keep speaking, keep confronting. And I will do it all again if the circumstances are ever the same. I would do it again because I am not just doing this for myself. I was out there for my family, for our family. And I was there for everyone else. I hope that something I do keeps the next generation from being raised to become racists without even knowing it.

Brothers and Sisters, this world is broken. Justice in America – and so many places on earth – is not blind. If she were blind, she would not be blindfolded. She can see very clearly. She can see which ethnic group you belong to, how old or young you are, which side of the tracks you live on.

Justice, without the blindfold, can be manipulated by those who claim to exact it; to make you afraid of black people or Hispanic people, to make you dismiss addicts and ex-cons, to prevent us all from embracing equality or extending grace; to prevent us from affirming that we are all made in God's image. I think the blindfold was pulled off in this country when, not long ago, white men constructed a phenomenon called Race to make sure that people of color would never be considered equal, based solely on skin tone. Justice needs someone to help her with her blindfold, and we marched this Monday to demand that she retie it.

The Constitution says that US citizens are innocent until proven guilty, but as a black man I am treated as if I am guilty and have to prove my innocence. The Church knows this tension -more than anyone. We are a community of people called to love and trust one another, but we remain suspicious, cynical, and judgmental of people who do not fit into the categories we have deemed proper. Let's be first to admit this hypocrisy, and turn from it. Let's run to testify to our communities, and let's demand that the authorities search themselves for this hypocrisy as well.

Brothers and Sisters, I know that many of you are tired of hearing about Ferguson or surrounding discussions. I get so tired of talking about ethnic division, marching about it, meeting about it, sitting on stages in forums about it, but what else can I do when it seems that so many US citizens don't know, or often forget the history of this country – how our cities evolved into their present state — how many of them became the "hood." I grew up in North Saint Louis and I saw how it happened here. In the 60s and 70s a large tract of North Saint Louis (The Ville, Fountain Park and a few other neighborhoods) were racially diverse, with a large percentage of middle class households. Then, the white folks left the City. Many white churches left, especially white Evangelical churches. It was a westward expansion to Saint Louis County. As a result, we are a hyper segregated city in a country that seems to be happy with "separate and unequal" standards of social justice for the black and brown underclass. No wonder my actions seem like foolishness to so many, it would seem like foolishness to me too if I didn't know what I know about racism – or if I didn't believe my foolish acts would help change things in this country.

Many of you see me as your pastor and it is an honor for me to serve you and the Lord in this capacity. However, I would ask you to see me as your friend. As we sit together on Sunday mornings, we are tearing down the historical segregation of the American church, and working towards true unity. But we cannot stop there. We must pursue “the elimination of racism in all its forms” as our elders stated in June. So, let’s attack division in all its forms, together. Let’s sit together in each other’s homes. Sit with me during a traffic stop, sit with me at the Rib Shack in north city, sit with me when people think it’s weird that you have a black pastor, sit with me when people think it’s weird that so many of the people I serve are white.

I love our country and I know we can do better – God help the USA. But I love you more than any duty assignment I’ve been given, and I know that we will do better, because the Spirit has shown us the end of our story. That’s how I know that we cannot give up, no matter how tired or uncomfortable it gets. We march on, pray on, sing on – because we know The God of righteousness and justice; true justice.

This Justice is neither blind nor blindfolded, it need not be. While justice in America is blindfolded to ensure some artificial security from bias, true Justice sees all our differences, discerns all distinctions, and judges fairly still. This is our future: we will all see, and finally see rightly.

Mike Higgins,

Dean of Students Covenant Theological Seminary

Lead Pastor of South City Church

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Fathers and Brothers,

Church planting is tenuous business. Every church planter wants to see their church thrive. Typically, however, there are several points or seasons in the life of this kind of mission work when he's not wondering whether the church will thrive. He's wondering whether the church will actually survive. Often, an "apple of gold in a setting of silver (Prov. 25:11)" comes to him at just the right time. This word of encouragement from the Lord enables him to keep pressing on, at least for a while.

"City of Hope has to make it. Our family needs this church."

As we were again facing the financial challenges of church planting, a dear woman at our church spoke these words to me. She's Caucasian. Her husband is of Middle Eastern descent. They have two biological children, and two adopted African American children. They've been members of the typical majority white PCA church. Why does she feel as though their family needs our church? It is because we are striving intentionally to live out the gospel imperative of redemptive ethnic unity in Christ. That is, our union with Christ compels us to pursue re-union and reconciliation across the ethnic lines that divide us outside of Christ. We believe that this is the natural outworking of our covenantal theological commitment.

What does this have to do with the personal resolution on Civil Rights Remembrance that was referred to at the 44th Assembly? A great deal. The beauty of pursuing reconciliation is that it pushes us to be honest about sin and its bitter fruit. Why are we a majority white denomination? Why have we been content, in spite of past resolutions and official statements around the area of slavery and racism, to not embrace the types of changes necessary if our churches are going to break out of our cultural captivity? Why is it that the number of African American pastors is still slightly over 1% of the total number? Why is it that many African Americans, and other minorities, feel so out of place in our churches, or even refuse to join a Presbyterian church?

The answers to those questions are multi-faceted. They involve actions by, and attitudes of, churches. They involve choices by individuals. After all, I am one of those few African American PCA pastors, and I've chosen to commit to and love this denomination. Yet, the negative aspects of American Presbyterian history that were evident in the Civil Rights era is woven into the answer to each of those questions. It is particularly relevant that we declare ourselves to be the continuing church of the PCUS. Therefore, we own its history as well.

Recent work by Stephen R. Hayes in *The Last Segregated Hour*, and by TE Sean Michael Lucas in his upcoming book on the history of the PCA have helped to make us aware of the specific sins that were committed. Whether we like it or not, the perception by many minorities that the PCA is a white, socially conservative, right-winged, racist denomination is connected to this history. This is why, when we began our church in 2007, we named it City of Hope Church. We didn't want the "Presbyterian" hump to be the first hump people had to overcome when they considered our church.

We are now, officially, City of Hope Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian hump is still real. However, what is more real is the grace of Christ, enabling us to engage openly and honestly about who we are, where we've come from, and where we desire to see the Lord take us. My sense is that the 44th General Assembly in Mobile, AL may be an Acts 15 hour for our denomination. I pray that we will, without fear, engage openly and honestly about who we are, where we've come from, and where we desire to see the Lord take us.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Irwyn L. Ince, Jr.  
Columbia, MD  
October 17, 2015



*Randy Nabors grew up in the inner-city of Newark, NJ, in a church that had a strong commitment to the city and its people. Randy is the Pastor Emeritus of New City Chattanooga and now serves as the Coordinator of Urban and Mercy Ministries for Mission to North America, as well as serving as the Coordinator of the New City Network. Randy is a graduate of Covenant Seminary in St. Louis (M.Div), and has done graduate work in urban sociology and urban ministry at the College of Urban Life, Georgia State University and Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He and his wife Joan have 4 children.*

## **A PROVOCATION TO REPENTANCE AND JUSTICE**

I announce this essay in such a manner because I am convinced we need, as American Christians, to be provoked to repentance for any injustice we have perpetuated either through sins of commission or omission. The writer of Hebrews said, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24) Maybe some of that "spur" might be to confront ourselves with the truth of how we have treated and continue to treat one another across racial, ethnic, economic and social lines. I ask, is it possible that we might humbly and honestly enquire if there is any need for change in ourselves so that we might truly love our neighbors as ourselves?

There are hindrances to such conversations (within our denomination and the larger body of Christ) and I suspect that some of them are not consciously realized. Some of this has to do with the political climate and the emphasis we receive (and then parrot) from our non-discriminatory reception of pundits, talk show hosts, and internet stories and opinions that push us away from listening with compassion and toward a hardening of our hearts against those we somehow feel are trying to limit our glory or freedom as Americans. Far too many Christians have taken their (our) Christian faith and made it synonymous with a conservative political outlook and agenda.

The word conservative is a big word and it probably means too much at one time, and thus maybe not enough at all. As I believe in Biblical inerrancy and the consequent necessity of preaching a blood purchased substitutionary atonement, and thus believe that there is a need for individuals to be born again by the Holy Spirit, I am a theological conservative. As I believe the teaching and inference of Holy Scripture teach us that abortion, (for reasons other than to save the physical life of the mother) is murder, and that the practice of homosexual sex is sinful and that there can be no such thing as a true homosexual marriage, I am a social conservative.

It does not follow however that I am radically and necessarily committed to limited government, or to a large defense budget, or to bombing without prior diplomacy. It does not follow that I always think America is right, all Democrats evil and wrong about everything, or that when they are right must have ulterior motives. Actually, because I have a very conservative opinion about the authority of the Bible and believe it is the revelation of God's will for how I am to live, I am forced to have a great concern for the poor and for how we treat those who are marginalized or oppressed.

Continuing with the idea of identifying hindrances to repentance we notice a stubborn refusal to admit that certain icons of our religious heritage have clay feet. While being in a denomination that teaches total depravity it would seem that criticizing certain of our forefathers and founders for their racist views, for their racially contrived exegesis of Scripture, and a determined defense of what was an indefensible and unjust system of both slavery and segregation is not only ironic, but scandalous.

The hypocrisy of our blindness is exhibited by some members of a recent committee, while discussing the call for our denomination to repent for some of our founders supporting and defending segregation or doing nothing about it, chastised the authors of a resolution for not going directly to those founders as Matthew 18 would call for them to do. At the same time, when some do go to those founders to entreat them as older brothers about their public, published, and shameful opinions it begets a wailing and howling for "attacking" these revered figures in their old age. It seems we shouldn't criticize them for what are their undenounced public opinions, nor should we go to them personally, no matter how gently done, as they somehow should be protected from such confrontations. Is this a protecting of persons or a protecting of sin?

There's the issue isn't it, the question that gets to the heart of it and us; is racism sin? Is the hatred of a person a sin? Is the hatred of a group of people a sin, or treating them in hateful ways, is that a sin? Or how about not thinking about them at all, nor seeing them as equally made in God's image as ourselves, so that what happens to them has no conscious affect upon us at all; is that sin? Is failing to love your brother a sin? How about failing to love your neighbor as yourself, is that a sin? Is failing to show mercy, when need is right in front of us, a sin? Or how about seeing the opportunity to do good and doing it not, is that sin? Is failing to protect the weak and helpless, or to say or do nothing when some are led away to slaughter a sin? Is it okay to say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Proverbs 24:12)

How could racism and its de jure or de facto protection (either by direct vocal opinion or silent support of the status quo) possibly be sin if held by such ardent supporters of the Reformed faith? Yet the histories of Apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow in our own American South, or segregation and discrimination in other parts of our country, were buttressed by churches and theological apologists. Please understand that these systems were not benign ignorance (s). These systemic racial philosophies made people poor, kept them without education, employment, or health care. These systems deprived people of property, dignity, and freedom. These systems falsely imprisoned people, and at times murdered them, all simply because of the color of their skin.

Here we might possibly see some deeper spiritual issues among us. Holiness, one might suspect, would make us quick to confess and repent. A continuing attitude of repentance would seem to be a constant for the saints. Humility and a joyful faith and hope in the sweet forgiveness and reconciliation of God would seem to take away any fear of repentance. Only a persistent and stubborn self-righteousness might keep it from us.

It is certainly right and good to be careful about labeling anyone, and certainly wrong to condemn people easily, and never in a self-righteous spirit as if all the rest of us didn't have our own sin. Yet sin of whatever sort is always to be condemned and never excused, period. Pride resists hearing any accusation, especially against ourselves or our heroes. Such issues deserve an honest introspection and if there is no sin in us, or our church, or our denomination, or in our agencies nor in our past then we can all say, "hallelujah!" If there is, then there should be no resistance to calling it for what it is and getting rid of it at the cross of Jesus as soon as we can. There is only shame in holding onto it, or denying it, or excusing it, but none in having it forsaken and forgiven.

God still forgives, and we ought to forgive each other. Brothers who have had erroneous doctrinal positions have always been called out in our church courts. Brothers who have committed moral sins have been called out in the courts of the church. There has been repentance and forgiveness, and there has also been discipline, and some have been vindicated when it was found that there was no sin. This is as it should be, yet we have allowed error in Biblical exegesis, allowed the spreading of spurious and rationalized racial views that cause harm to members of our own churches, and said little or nothing. If someone had said, "God is not sovereign" we would have thrown them out on their ear, but when others have implied that some human beings made in God's image were not our equal, or their marriages were unclean, or that their souls were not our business we have allowed them prominent places in our courts.

We look for healing through the acknowledgment of past mistakes, or some sense of ownership for the hurt and pain. We look for reconciliation and not a continual adversarial relationship. We do not desire people to be accused and held under some kind of continual guilt and condemnation. However, we cannot accept that past vindictive and heinous attitudes, ideas, and actions of our past would be allowed to be unrefuted in the present and remain as a constant insult to the people, and children of those people, who were its victims.

**Randy Nabors**

